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Central Intelligence Agency
Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence

17 April 1986

NOTE TO: The Secretary of State

Mr. Secretary

In your letter to the Director forwarding a list of issues of particular concern to you, you expressed particular interest in any work we might have done on exploiting Soviet troubles in the Middle East. We are continuing to examine these opportunities, but in the meantime I believe you would find of interest two thinkpieces prepared for the Director by Graham Fuller, the NIO for the Near East, and his assistant

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Because they were prepared strictly for the DCI, I would appreciate your not circulating them any further.

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Robert M. Gates
Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachments:

NIC 01317-86, dtd 14Mar86
NIC 01369-86, dtd 14Mar86

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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 01317-86
14 March 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Graham E. Fuller
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: Taking Advantage of Soviet Weaknesses in the Middle East

1. The chief Soviet weaknesses in the Middle East derive from the fact that they have little to offer except:

- Plentiful arms at reasonable or low cost.
- A time-tested Leninist system of regime control, enhancing the ability of rulers to stay in power longer.
- A modest system of supporting states that can help out in times of stress: the East Bloc and Soviet clients such as Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Ethiopia, etc. They can provide weapons, advisors--sometimes even troops--and diplomatic support.

2. Soviet weaknesses are the obverse:

- Considerable rigidity in dealing with most states.
- Inability to provide meaningful financial aid on a regular basis.
- Lack of ties to any international economic or cultural support system, banking system, and marketing system to benefit its clients--all of which the West can provide.
- A distinct Soviet preference that the client state maintain its "revolutionary character"--and preserve its ties with the USSR--through limitation of corrupting ties with the moderate state systems around the world--resulting in a de facto isolation.

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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 01369-86
14 March 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM:

Assistant National Intelligence Officer for NESA

SUBJECT: Asad's Departure and US Interests

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2. His death will be a relief to many who, quite rightly, see him exercising unusual skill in undermining US efforts in the Middle East at every juncture, but a caution: His departure will also open the door for possible very negative developments that would be major setbacks for US interests in the region:

- His successor may be unable to keep the Soviets at bay as Asad has, Soviet influence over Syria could increase, and Moscow could even end up gaining basing rights at Tartus, giving the Soviet Union a major base on the Mediterranean.
- Syrian terrorism--currently measured and aimed at sending political messages--might become more indiscriminate, frequent, and bloody.
- Asad's successor could stumble into a war with Israel or launch one to legitimize his government.
- Syria could slip back into a period of successive coups, chronic instability, and mercurial leadership, rendering impossible US and Israeli efforts to deal with Syria as a peace partner, but not eliminating Syria's ability to play the spoiler.

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